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Friday, 11 December 1998, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mra (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 46 (*continued*)

Fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Draft decision (A/53/L.71)

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Italy.

Mr. Fulci (Italy): Italy fully endorses the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union, which gave a thorough outline of the Union's policies, philosophy and actions in this crucial area. I wish merely to add some complementary remarks on two human rights areas to which Italy feels especially committed.

Italy is proud to have done its part to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by hosting in Rome the diplomatic conference to establish an international criminal court. We Italians thought that the best way to honour the Declaration was to help the United Nations achieve a goal it had pursued for more than fifty years: the creation of a permanent judicial body to prosecute and punish the most serious crimes of international concern, wherever and by whomever committed. As everyone knows, the conference was a success, and the International Criminal Court is now a reality. Rome, with its millennial legal tradition, provided the ideal setting for this milestone toward defeating the culture of impunity for the most heinous violations of human rights and human dignity. Borders must no longer exist for such crimes.

While the text of the Statute of the International Criminal Court reflects compromise solutions on a number of crucial aspects, the Court is still a strong, effective and independent institution, capable of responding to the demand for justice in today's international society.

What is now essential is to make the new tribunal start its work as soon as possible. We trust that the Preparatory Commission will promptly elaborate the instruments needed for the Statute. More importantly, the signatures and ratifications of the Statute must lead to its entry into force in the year 2000. We warmly congratulate all those States who have already signed the Statute. By the end of this month, 73 nations will have signed it, and we urge all others to do likewise.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, has recently reminded the world that

> "millions of victims of human rights violations are children, who, as the most vulnerable part of society, are victims of abandonment, abuses,

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violence, poverty, lack of education, hunger, wars and economic and sexual exploitation".

One of the many disturbing findings in the recent report on the state of the world's children is that 130 million children in developing countries have no access to any form of education.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration recognizes that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Children, first and foremost, need and deserve protection, a principle solemnly reaffirmed and integrated by the United Nations through a series of landmark achievements: the foundation of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1946, the Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1959, the International Covenants on Human Rights of 1966, the International Year of the Child, 1979, and finally, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, of 1989.

This last Convention, which was signed by 193 countries and ratified by 191 of them (six more than the United Nations general membership) has become the most universal legal instrument ever agreed upon by the international community. Furthermore, the relentless work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which meets for a total of three months a year in Geneva to monitor implementation by States parties to the Convention, bears testimony to the ongoing commitment of the international community to the rights of children.

On the solemn occasion of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Italy reaffirms its belief that children are and must remain the priority of our priorities. This conviction stems not solely from humanitarian concerns, but also from the fact that children represent the future of humanity. If we wish to meet and overcome the challenges and uncertainties of the future, then today's children — all of them — must be granted the right to become healthy, educated, mature adults.

From this podium, Italy once again pledges its special commitment to international cooperation in support of child policies, especially in developing countries. We pledge to identify and prioritize, in collaboration with recipient countries, programmes for the care and rehabilitation of children who have been exploited economically or sexually, persecuted, used as soldiers, maimed by mines or left homeless or destitute, who, in short, are the first victims of poverty. To remedy these situations, my Government stands ready to increase its efforts, energies and tangible assistance projects that privilege children and their rights.

I wish to close by taking this opportunity to warmly thank the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly for last night's unique celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration. The Declaration testifies to the supreme value we all place in the human spirit, and since music is one of the highest expressions of the human spirit, no more fitting tribute to this achievement could have been made than the clarion voice of Luciano Pavarotti and the swinging sounds of Wynton Marsalis.

The Acting President: I call now on the representative of Jamaica.

Ms. Durrant (Jamaica): My delegation associates itself fully with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Guyana on behalf of the Caribbean Community. I make the following statement on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica.

On 10 December 1948, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the international community adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a set of commonly accepted standards based on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The international community thus gave recognition to the principle that respect for the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of all members of the human family constituted the foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Today, some 50 years since this historic event, the Declaration remains a powerful document which continues to influence national legislation and the constitutions of many States. Its emphasis on the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights and fundamental freedoms has inspired numerous human rights instruments, which together constitute an international standard by which the promotion and protection of human rights are measured.

Jamaica joins the international community in underscoring the significance of this fiftieth anniversary and welcomes this year's theme, "All Human Rights for All", which calls for a holistic approach to the issue of human rights and recognizes that the effective promotion of peace and security, economic prosperity and social equity are interdependent and inextricably linked.

Jamaica takes this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to playing its part in promoting and protecting the individual and collective rights of all, particularly the most vulnerable among us. We are cognizant of the fact that respect for human rights is central to the work of the United Nations — from peacekeeping, children's rights, health, education, social development and protection of the environment to the eradication of poverty. This has motivated our adherence to several human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Further, we have made it our constitutional duty and moral and political obligation to promote respect for human rights. This duty implies a commitment to accountability, transparency and integrity as the basic principles upon which good governance must rest.

It must be acknowledged, however, that while the State bears primary responsibility for ensuring human rights and for creating the necessary environment conducive thereto, people, whether individually or collectively organized in groups, must also take responsibility for the realization and effective promotion and protection of human rights and for building the social harmony and order in which these rights can best be advanced. A social partnership of Government, civil society and private interests in which each person is respectful of the rights of the other and of his or her responsibility to the community, is the best guarantee for the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of each citizen. This is the basis of the Caribbean Charter of Civil Society, to which Jamaica fully subscribes.

Over the last fifty years much has been achieved, but much more remains to be done. Apartheid has been eradicated in South Africa, colonialism has been largely dismantled and the cold war ended, but there still exists widespread discrimination on the basis of race, gender and religious belief. Around the world there is continuing civil strife based on religious intolerance and ethnic hatred. Millions of people are still denied food, shelter and access to medical care and education, and many continue to live in extreme poverty.

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Jamaica recommits its best efforts towards building on the achievements of these last 50 years and towards better preparing itself for meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. We shall continue our determined action to promote a national and global order based on justice and equity in which all human rights are preserved, promoted and protected in the true spirit of the Universal Declaration.

The President took the Chair.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of the Maldives.

Mr. Shihab (Maldives): The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is truly a momentous occasion which calls for both celebration and reflection.

It is a time for celebration because of the enormous contribution the Declaration has made to the cause of promoting human rights the world over. It has produced positive results, advancing human values and giving a fuller meaning to the lives of peoples everywhere. It has spawned and inspired over 60 human rights instruments, many of which enjoy the force of international law.

Yet, we must pause for reflection. Fifty years down the track, formidable challenges persist to inhibit the universal realization of the vision enunciated in the Declaration. Half a century later, there are many tottering on the edge of fear and suffering that the framers of the Declaration wished to banish. Time and again over the past five decades, we have seen a most disturbing trend of relapse to the most heinous crimes against humanity that so galvanized States into action in the aftermath of the Second World War. Today, we must seriously reflect upon ways to prevent such occurrences ever again.

We must also ponder strategies to make the full achievement of the goals of the Declaration truly universal and real. This requires that we recognize the links between peace, democracy and development. None of these could be ignored in our attempts to promote human dignity, alleviate suffering and safeguard the sanctity of the person.

The lot of the poor may make less sensational headlines, but their plight deserves our serious attention if we wish to promote human rights. It has been estimated that more people died of hunger in the first two years of the last decade than were killed as a result of the

First and Second World Wars. During the same period, hunger caused as many deaths every two days as were caused by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The numbers have only increased in the 1990s. It is therefore obvious that the goals of the Declaration cannot be realized without addressing the silent crises of underdevelopment, poverty, population pressures and the degradation of the environment, which impose untold suffering and misery on millions. Therefore, as we step into the next century and the third millennium, we must redouble our efforts to achieve the noble ideals of the Declaration and ensure that human dignity is not the preserve of only the affluent.

We should recognize not only that fundamental human rights are universal in nature but that they must be considered in the context of the dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical backgrounds.

Let me conclude by assuring the Assembly that the Maldives will continue to lend its full support to the efforts and endeavours of this Organization to promote human rights. My country has made sustained progress in the protection and promotion of human rights through peace, democracy and development. We behold the future with optimism and hope, confident of continued happiness. We look forward to continued progress.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Koulïev (Azerbaijan) (*interpretation from Russian*): First of all, allow me to congratulate all of us on the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The significance of this historic Declaration is clear to all.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose provisions are reflected in the constitutions of many States, is the basis for the protection and observance of the basic rights and freedoms of all people in the world. Each individual is entitled to enjoy all basic human rights and to the full protection of those rights, including the right to life, liberty, security of person, citizenship and freedom of movement, ownership of property and the presumption of innocence. Over the past 50 years much has been done in the world to implement the provisions of this Declaration. Regrettably, on this ceremonial day we must acknowledge that human rights continue to be violated in some parts of the world. We call on the international community to unite its efforts to combat such grave human rights violations as genocide, racism and xenophobia.

Since the first days of the restoration of its independence, Azerbaijan has experienced the tragedy of serious human rights violations. As a result of continuing aggression by Armenia against Azerbaijan, 20 per cent of the territory of our country is currently occupied. The policy of ethnic cleansing, conducted by Armenia in the occupied territories, has brought about the forcible displacement of 1 million people, who have made temporary homes in other towns and villages of Azerbaijan. Clearly, the rights of those people, including such a basic right as the right to live in their own land, have been gravely violated.

Despite all the difficulties that my country has faced since the restoration of its independence, Azerbaijan has been consistently building a democratic society. Earlier this year a State commission for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created by decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Recently, the State department for the censorship of the communications media was done away with by presidential decree. One of the great achievements of the democratization of society was the abolition of the death penalty in January of this year. The President introduced another humanitarian act in May: a decree on amnesty for prisoners. In accordance with this decree, thousands of convicted persons were amnestied. In order to strengthen the legal human rights instruments, in February the President introduced an act on measures to ensure the freedoms and rights of citizens.

A research institute on human rights has recently been set up. The institute is devoted to finding ways to create mechanisms for the comprehensive protection of human rights and basic freedoms. On 4 December 1998, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Heydar Aliyev, addressing the meeting of the State commission on the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, mentioned the positive development of the growing cooperation between Government structures and non-governmental organizations in the field of the protection of human rights. He expressed the opinion that notwithstanding some success in the area of observance and protection of human rights, much more had to be done in order to achieve better results. That is the common goal of our Government structures and of every individual.

The achievement by the Republic of Azerbaijan of the status of special guest in the Council of Europe is an important contribution to the development of democratic reforms. It provides an opportunity for us to become deeply integrated into European legal structures and to receive expert assistance for the success of reforms in Azerbaijan.

The Government of Azerbaijan continues to provide all the conditions necessary for the protection of human rights. In addition to the new Constitution, by which the basic rights and freedoms of citizens are ensured, legislation has been adopted on political parties and public organizations, on the communications media, on freedom of religion and on alternative military service. Many of the bills that have been passed in Azerbaijan, including those relating to presidential elections and the Central Electoral Committee, have been endorsed by legal experts from international organizations. In recent years, the Parliament of Azerbaijan has enacted legislation that has totally changed the rules and functions of law-enforcement agencies and courts, including those relating to the police, to prosecution, to courts and judges and to the constitutional court. Draft laws on the municipalities and on elections to the municipal bodies are currently under consideration in Parliament.

We realize that the creation of a domestic legal foundation is not sufficient to create a democratic society. Since the first day of its independence, our country has acceded to 109 international legal instruments, covering almost all areas of life. The Government is doing its utmost to implement the provisions of those instruments. More than 30 of them deal with the protection and observance of human rights.

In the past, Azerbaijan has presented to the Secretary-General initial reports on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Preparation of the second periodic reports is currently under way.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize the crucial role played by the United Nations and its agencies in the comprehensive observance of human rights throughout the world. I call on all States to continue their support for the United Nations in order to ensure full protection for and observance of human rights.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Panama.

Mr. Stagg (Panama) (*interpretation from Spanish*): In their desire to seek justice in the period of great confusion experienced by mankind 50 years ago, persons of goodwill came together, in the midst of inequities of all kinds, with the aim of finding ways to express the aspirations of humankind. The Declaration that emerged from those meetings in 1948, although it is not perfect, includes the legal and moral bases that a new society desired in order to overcome the divisions of the world. The Declaration that dates from that period seeks to define an order for public life, morality and general well-being in an attempt to find the correct interpretation of an enjoyment of the freedoms and rights formulated therein.

At that time, the Commission on Human Rights was established within the Secretariat, and it began the study of various projects on which the Panamanian internationalists Mr. Ricardo Alfaro and Mr. Mario de Diego worked with great perseverance.

For the first time, an organized community of nations achieved a Declaration on fundamental human rights and freedoms in a document that had the support of the millions of people represented in the United Nations, men, women and children from all parts of the planet seeking support and guidance in order to find the best possible solutions to humankind's problems.

On 4 September 1998, at a meeting of the Rio Group, the Government of the Republic of Panama articulated in the Panama Declaration the common standard that all peoples and nations of the world wish to attain, taking into account the principles of the universality and indivisibility of human rights, democracy and development. On that historic occasion, we expressed the deep concern of our peoples with regard to having a modern and effective judicial order. We spoke out very strongly against racial discrimination and in favour of fair conditions of migration, which is an entitlement of all human beings regardless of origin.

Panama has always been ready to ensure the exercise of fundamental human rights in order to prevent cruel, inhumane or degrading punishment or treatment from being meted out in any part of the world.

In modernizing our economy we have frequently experienced the traumas often entailed by structural reforms, which are necessary even though they may be

painful. But, fortunately, with a minimum of suffering we have managed to move forward with progressive Governments such as the present one.

Our country has always supported appropriate protection for the most vulnerable groups of society, particularly ethnic minorities, women and children. Our citizens are aware that education and the eradication of poverty are the best way to promote human rights.

We wish to place on record our tribute to the great efforts made in the last four years by the First Lady of Panama with a view to fulfilling all the provisions relating to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to the good treatment of children.

On 26 January 1990, Panama signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ratified it on 5 October 1990. The Convention entered into force on 11 January 1991. We are very proud to say that we have always promoted the physical and psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration of children who have been the victims of all kinds of conflicts, abuse, abandonment, exploitation and torture in order to provide them with a climate in which they can enjoy better health, self-respect and a childhood in dignity.

As a priority, the Republic of Panama has become a party to the various conventions and protocols that provide for basic measures to combat international terrorism. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide is one of the oldest treaties for the protection of human rights; it was adopted on 9 December 1948, a day earlier than the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Regrettably, today there are still Governments in the world that have been unable to suppress this deplorable manifestation of hatred and have persisted in using the power of their armies as an instrument of diplomacy.

This year's adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court in Rome is a significant step forward towards punishing genocide.

We are particularly gratified to note the beneficial participation of the United Nations Development Programme in promoting greater respect for the human rights of our people.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Mali.

Mr. Ouane (Mali) (*interpretation from French*): Following one of the darkest pages in the history of humankind, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948.

This was not just an act of faith expressing the protestations of the human conscience at the horrors of the Second World War; it was also, above all, a founding act. By proclaiming basic universal and indivisible human rights for the individual, the Declaration achieved an ideal for all of humankind by offering both a basis and a framework for all further progress in this field.

Today we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of this historic document. This is an opportunity for us not only to go back to our sources but also to consider the message of the Declaration, which, it should be recalled, has lost neither its strength nor its currency.

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, considerable efforts to build and codify rights for the individual have been carried out. The international community has adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as Conventions on the elimination of discrimination against women, on racial discrimination and against torture.

To ensure the reality of these rights, especially at the regional level, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights was adopted. Similarly, at the domestic level, the promotion and protection of human rights is a major requirement for the third Malian Republic. I would like in this regard to mention the institutionalization, since 1994, of our democratic appeals system, which enables individuals, political parties and civil society to appeal directly and publicly, on 10 December every year, to the Government regarding respect for human rights in Mali.

In the same spirit, we have institutionalized a children's parliament, which is a forum for the children of Mali to express themselves freely to help public authorities implement a national plan of action for the survival, development and protection of the child.

At a time of globalization and of growing influence by economic actors, we must struggle for human rights

especially in the area of inequality and exclusion. Democracy and economic development are mutually reinforcing and together foster a climate propitious for the establishment of a State based on the rule of law, in which both tension and poverty are reduced.

Convinced of these facts, Mali is committed to promoting the right to development, which is the preeminent right of solidarity. This new human right, based on the idea of interdependence, means that all human beings and all peoples have a right to development: to prosperity, which in turn will prevent hunger, disease and illiteracy. It also means greater justice in international economic relations.

As we follow up the outcome of the 1993 Vienna Conference, we must together consider new threats to human rights: such problems as the deterioration of the environment, artificial procreation and information technologies, which can call into question the right to life, the integrity of the individual or freedom of expression.

At the same time, how can we fail to welcome the adoption, in this fiftieth-anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of the Statute of the International Criminal Court? My country, Mali, has already signed the Statute and will do its utmost for the speedy establishment of the Court, which is an essential instrument for the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I reaffirm Mali's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, *inter alia* through its unqualified support for the resolution adopted by the General Assembly on this item.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): Before calling on the next speaker, I should like to consult the Assembly with a view to proceeding immediately to consider the draft decision contained in document A/53/L.71. In this connection, since that document was circulated only a short while ago, it would be necessary to waive the relevant provision of rule 78 of the rules of procedure, which reads as follows:

> "As a general rule, no proposal shall be discussed or put to the vote at any meeting of the General Assembly unless copies of it have been circulated to all delegations not later than the day preceding the meeting".

Bearing in mind the content of the draft decision, by which the Assembly would simply decide to include in the agenda of its fifty-eighth session an item entitled "Fifty-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights", may I take it that the Assembly agrees to that proposal?

It was so decided.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): We shall now proceed to consider draft decision A/53/L.71. May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft decision?

The draft decision was adopted.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call now on the representative of Eritrea.

Mr. Seyoum (Eritrea): As we commemorate the fiftieth year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is much for all of us to reflect upon in our common conception of what constitutes universally applicable human rights and our practice in their implementation. I believe that we all maintain, or at least declare we maintain, that the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are lofty ideals that should guide the conduct of all Governments, institutions and individuals in their handling of every person and every social group. Much has also been done in articulating and expanding the interpretation of the rights set out in those articles since they were proclaimed 50 years ago.

On this, there is hardly any controversy. If differences exist, it is in minor areas where differences in cultural heritage and other specific local conditions are at times invoked by some as excuses for limiting the scope of the application of some of the articles of the Declaration. Socio-economic development, widening global interaction, the rise in the general level of education and the resulting higher level of consciousness will, I believe, of necessity bridge the already narrow gap that exists among these interpretations. The Government of the State of Eritrea reaffirms that the Declaration is truly universal and that the notion of human rights ingrained in its principles can easily be traced through the linguistic, cultural and traditional structures of all societies.

The widest gap exists between what is embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the practice of human rights. The worldwide campaign for

respect for human rights has commendably been increasing, and this effort has definitely raised awareness, hope and the will to struggle in the powerless of the world. The human rights records of most Governments and the responses of others to those records, however, still fall far short of what needs to be done to ensure a humane existence for peoples throughout the world. For many Governments, human rights is often raised as a mere slogan, or is used as a political instrument to be applied against enemies, glossed over with friends and neglected where direct national interests warrant it.

Given such a reality, the United Nations, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, becomes a crucial instrument for collective action in raising the voice of the voiceless and defending the rights of the defenceless, who are still the victims of horrendous crimes. For exerting tireless efforts to ensure that the United Nations meets this challenge, the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, must be commended.

It goes without saying, of course, that the United Nations is the sum of its sovereign Member States, and the hands of its officials and institutions will remain weak or even tied unless the will to cooperate with their efforts is there from each and every nation. This cooperation, we must dare to admit, has not been there to the degree required, especially from those that have the capacity to provide it. But although unanimity may not be there, bold concerted efforts must be made by those committed to uphold and ensure the universal application of human rights. Such efforts, which represent the aspirations of the powerless billions in the world, can empower them and all those in and outside the United Nations who are engaged in defending human rights throughout the world to prevail against those that abuse them with impunity.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I would like to state here that my country's constitution upholds human rights and that my Government spares no effort to ensure that human rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are respected within Eritrea's borders. Our record proves this fact even during the most trying of times — in times of war and conflict.

It is deplorable to witness, however, that certain Governments openly and flagrantly abuse human rights in the most heinous ways and that such crimes are allowed to continue without the appropriate response from the international community. I refer here, as a case in point, to the continuing deportation, detention, expropriation and inhumane treatment of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin by the Ethiopian Government, which have led not only to the suffering of tens of thousands but also to the deaths of many. To date, the number of those unjustly deported and arbitrarily detained has reached more than 40,000, and as I speak now to the Assembly, the witch-hunt and rounding up of those still remaining in the country is continuing.

Ethiopia's crimes against these innocent Eritrean civilians have been verified by numerous independent observers and condemned by some. Yet, the regime continues those crimes with impunity because there has not been appropriate international reaction against it. Unless action is taken where human rights crimes are perpetrated, the gap between our declared ideals and our actions will continue to widen, thus nullifying the meaning of the very ideals we purport to uphold.

Irrespective of this disappointment, my country pledges never to be deterred from doing its utmost to ensure that its actions conform to its beliefs and to continue to join those who are committed to working for a just world where human rights are universally respected. The United Nations needs to be the primary central forum for the coordination of such a collective effort. It is my sincere hope that our individual and collective actions in the days and years to come will live up to the high ideals enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the expectations of the powerless, who have no other recourse but to put their hope and trust in us to stand for them.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*interpretation from French*): We have come together here today to commemorate solemnly the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted in 1948 by our Assembly, this historic Declaration remains the principal frame of reference for defining the needs of mankind in achieving its full development. It also embodies the hopes and ardent aspirations of the peoples of the world to live in peace, security and dignity and to fully enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Fifty years have elapsed and the world is still far from attaining the ideal that inspired the General

Assembly in 1948. Destitution, disease and hunger continue to haunt us and remain the major impediments to the full enjoyment of human rights. Given such a situation, it is vital for the international community to pool its efforts and undertake more vigorous actions in the search for the common objectives that we have set for ourselves.

The Lao nation is an ancient one, known for its age-old past. Throughout its long history, our heroic country has been the target of various foreign aggressions. Animated by an indomitable spirit of struggle and a determination to overcome, the multi-ethnic Laotian people has risen again and has always resisted the yoke of foreign domination. In declaring the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on 2 December 1975, the whole of the Lao people exercised its fundamental right to self-determination. Since the establishment of the new people's regime, our Government has spared no effort to rebuild its war-ravaged homeland, while at the same time ensuring the security of the State and social and political stability.

In 1991, the first constitution of the Republic to clearly set out the rights and duties of Laotian citizens was enacted. Many other laws in numerous fields were subsequently adopted, attesting to the Government's resolve to gradually convert our country into a State under the rule of law. The people of Laos now live in peace and harmony and are fully dedicated to building the national economy with a view to extricating the country from its current state of underdevelopment by 2020.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is 50 years old today. While significant contributions have been made in the field of human rights, much remains to be done. While reiterating our principled position that human rights should under no circumstances be used as political instruments to interfere in the domestic affairs of others, we believe that it is essential for the international community to cooperate and work together to achieve its goals in this regard. Only cooperation and sincere international dialogue will ensure success in this difficult undertaking of promoting human rights.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Mwamba Kapanga (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*interpretation from French*): One year from the dawning of a new millennium, while the international community celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is hardly any need to recall that my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is the subject of an armed aggression that is jeopardizing the basic rights of its citizens and that presents a serious threat to its sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

Despite that situation, which is a supreme example of the violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by virtue of the excesses committed daily against the populations of occupied provinces by the aggressors, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a peace-loving nation respectful of international conventions, would like to reaffirm its commitment to the principles set forth in the United Nations Charter.

The liberation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 17 May 1997 was intended to put an end to dictatorship and to give the Congolese people back their dignity, which had been so greatly affronted, through the establishment of the rule of law, respecting basic freedoms and human rights. My Government is among those that believes that recognition of the dignity inherent in all members of the human family and of their equal and inalienable rights is the basis for freedom, justice and peace throughout the world.

That is why, immediately following liberation, the Government worked resolutely to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the national territory and to establish human rights programmes. It must be acknowledged that despite all the obstacles encountered, our Government has, even in the difficult context of the current war of aggression, managed to give material expression to the dedication of the Congolese people to a culture of peace and human rights.

Despite the situation on the ground, the Government has adhered to its time-table for the effective democratization of the national political territory. To this end, several phases of the electoral time-table have been completed. The latest was the announcement by the head of State, at the twentieth Summit Conference of the French and African Heads of State, of the lifting at the end of January 1999 of measures suspending activities by political parties.

We would note the creation on 1 June 1998 of a Ministry for human rights whose aim is to promote and protect the rights of the individual in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That Ministry is also endeavouring to promote and ensure respect for international humanitarian law. It is also noteworthy that

since 28 September 1998, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been given access by my Government to combatants and other detainees as well as to prisoners of war. The Red Cross has already begun its work by applying the relevant criteria for visits and hearings.

Another of my Government's achievements is the establishment of an interdepartmental commission for humanitarian issues which, in the context of the current aggression, ensures protection for vulnerable individuals and facilitates the departure abroad of those who wish to do so.

With respect to the commemoration of the event that brings us together at this time, I should like to inform the international community that the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a State Member of the United Nations, in keeping with the spirit and letter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has not remained on the sidelines of this event. It is pursuing in this context the implementation of a national plan of action for education in the area of human rights.

Therefore, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Kinshasa, the Ministry for human rights of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has for the past few weeks been sponsoring various types of activities as part of a campaign to heighten awareness of human rights throughout various sectors of Congolese society, especially civil society, universities, the army, the police and the judiciary.

The Ministry for human rights has just announced its determination to enter into partnership with the army and the national police with respect to the promotion and protection of human rights. Furthermore, on Tuesday, 8 December 1998, it began a campaign to disseminate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in all four national languages.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would like to reiterate its request for assistance in reforming its judicial system so as to help sustain its ongoing efforts to better promote and protect human rights throughout our national territory. Such an attitude would be in keeping with the mission of the United Nations, whose primary task is to promote universal adherence to the international instruments and their more strict implementation by States parties.

In conclusion, let me reiterate our Government's commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its determination to establish the rule of law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Finally, let me state that the Congolese Ministry for human rights, which handles the national coordination of human rights issues, will continue to ensure full respect by all parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for fundamental human rights.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Gabon.

Mr. Essonghe (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): My delegation would like at the outset to associate itself with the statement made yesterday evening by the representative of Burkina Faso on behalf of the States members of the Organization of African Unity.

Through its adoption of instruments on the promotion and protection of human rights, the United Nations has set out to respond to the many attacks against and violations of the dignity and integrity of human beings around the world throughout history. At the very beginning of its existence, our Organization embarked on a debate on human rights which culminated, on 10 December 1948, in the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today's commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of that Declaration gives us an opportunity to see how far we have come.

Much has already been said about the milestones in the area of fundamental human rights from the Declaration's adoption in 1948 to the present day. The year 1998 has been key in this respect, with, *inter alia*, the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the launching of preparations for the World Conference against racism, racial and ethnic discrimination, xenophobia and other related contemporary forms of intolerance. And let us not forget the Statute establishing the International Criminal Court, adopted at the Rome Conference in July by a number of countries, including my own.

However, after 50 years of efforts and progress in promoting and protecting human rights, we must face the fact that worldwide, massive violations of the principles set out in the Declaration continue to take place, even though the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms must be one of the priority goals of the international community.

In keeping with this philosophy, Gabon consider human rights to be one of the basic foundations of its existence. The establishment of a State based on the rule of law, founded on respect for the law and in particular for human rights as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was the ongoing concern of our forefathers, who led our country to independence. In our Constitution, therefore, the Gabonese people affirm their resolve to safeguard their independence and national unity as well as their commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms. That resolve, under the leadership of Mr. El Hadj Omar Bongo, has been reflected at the international level in our accession to the majority of existing human rights instruments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Also, having chaired the ad hoc working group of the Security Council on the situation of conflicts in Africa, we cannot fail to mention the close link between conflicts and human rights.

As you know, the many conflicts that continue to fester throughout the world, particularly in Africa, have given rise to many flagrant violations of human rights and of humanitarian law committed against civilian populations and refugees. It is for this reason that we call for an end to the flow of weapons to those regions of the world.

The enjoyment of human rights is also a long-term undertaking which must neither neglect nor ignore the economic, social or cultural needs of the individual. For how can we truly speak of human rights when access to foodstuffs and education is not available to the vast majority of the world's people, in particular those of the South.

This issue, as we see it, should be an absolute priority among the tasks still to be done in order to bring ourselves into line with all the noble ideals embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Similarly, the international community must ensure that the new millennium is free from the moral ravages that humankind has experienced, such as slavery, colonialism, apartheid and genocide, just to cite a few examples.

Mr. Snoussi (Morocco) (*interpretation from French*): Today we are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which may be regarded as one of the great achievements of the United Nations. It is an opportunity for us to consider humankind's achievements in terms of securing the dignity of the human individual and to implement the fundamental principles of justice, freedom and peace.

Throughout the last half century, unquestioned progress has been achieved in the area of combating human rights violations, and fundamental achievements have consolidated democracy and expanded the scope of freedom throughout the world. However, these remarkable advances do not mean that humankind's objectives have been achieved, for man is still facing tremendous challenges which impede the implementation of an impressive number of accepted rights.

The proliferation of ethnic conflicts, genocide, the rise of racism and exclusivity, discrimination towards women, the persecution of minorities, imprisonment without due process, terrorism, worsening poverty and the harassment of human rights defenders are there as examples to remind us of this. Furthermore, advances in the area of human rights have essentially related to the civil and political fields, and inadequate attention has been given to economic, social and cultural rights. I hardly need to stress that economic development and social development are a key in economic recovery and in the development of democracy, political stability and human rights.

Morocco, which takes an active part in the building of a fair, just and democratic world order, today reiterates its commitment to the principles that motivated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirms its commitments to the strengthening of the rule of law, the protection of rights and freedoms in accordance with the precepts of Islam and the provisions of the constitution and international conventions ratified by our Kingdom.

In recent years, Morocco has passed through important stages on the path towards promoting and improving the situation in the area of human rights. The situation has undergone remarkable developments as result of the strengthening of the legal, judicial and administrative structures, including the creation of the Ministry of Human Rights and a number of other juridical instruments. Action to promote and protect human rights in Morocco is undertaken by governmental institutions, as well as by a large number of non-governmental organizations representing various political tendencies. The Advisory Council on Human Rights is responsible for ensuring the compatibility of national legislation with the spirit and letter of international instruments to which Morocco subscribes.

Among the actions undertaken in the area of promoting human rights is education on the principles of human rights and international conventions to which Morocco is a party, including training institutes designed to educate citizens as to their responsibilities. Morocco has also ratified most international instruments on human rights, being convinced that the rule of law, the freedom and equality of individuals, the rights of peoples, mutual understanding and cooperation will ultimately prevail.

The resolve of the Moroccan Government to promote human rights has been bolstered by the recent constitution, which stipulates that the Kingdom endorses the principles, rights and obligations stemming from the charters of the international agencies and reaffirms its commitment to human rights as universally recognized.

In April 1998 the Advisory Council on Human Rights held in Marrakesh the first Mediterranean meeting of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, in consultation with the Consultative Commission on Human Rights of France and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in the spirit of the Euro-Mediterranean conference held in Barcelona in 1995. This meeting culminated in the adoption of a protocol relating to the creation in Morocco of a training and documentation centre on human rights, a centre whose aim is to help to improve public perception of the universality and indivisibility of human rights with a view to establishing a better understanding of the values of peace, tolerance and dialogue.

Thanks to the resolve of and the guidance from His Majesty the King, the provisions adopted by the Moroccan Government to clear the outstanding files and the projects under way to harmonize laws, to establish education in human rights, to develop a dialogue and partnership with the various movements in society attest to Morocco's political will to establish a society built on solidarity and concertation.

While the phenomenon of globalization and interdependence which have marked the latter part of this century undoubtedly helps to improve and develop the world economy, it necessitates proper adjustments in order to avoid marginalizing countries whose economies are still precarious. It would seem appropriate to establish a democratic and fair dialogue, in which all States concerned can participate in order to realize the right to development, which is the aspiration of all developing countries. There is no question that this objective can be achieved only through strengthened United Nations intervention in the area of international cooperation for development.

Allow me to conclude by congratulating the United Nations for all its tireless efforts in the area of the promotion and protection of human rights, notwithstanding all the challenges of this latter part of the century.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mauritius.

Mr. Wan Chat Kwong (Mauritius): The signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 50 years ago was humanity's response to the darkest impulses of human nature, as revealed by the unspeakable horrors perpetrated during the Second World War. This Declaration was, at the same time, an act of faith that mankind can also be inspired by the most noble sentiments and aspirations.

But simply proclaiming the universal validity of human rights was, alas, by no means adequate to assure their observance and respect everywhere. As recent atrocities committed in parts of Europe, Africa and Asia attest all too well, the lessons of the Second World War do not seem to have been fully learned, and the call of "Never again" not sufficiently echoed.

Human rights will therefore remain the stage for perpetual struggle between the powers of darkness and the forces of enlightenment. That is the message my Prime Minister conveyed in concluding his statement last Tuesday at the unveiling ceremony of a monument dedicated to the Universal Declaration:

> "[The monument] is a permanent reminder to us of the dangers of complacency in the face of bigotry and intolerance and the overriding need for unity in the face of threats to democratic and decent values in public life."

Debates on human rights have all too often been polarized between those, at one end, who are perceived as laying greater stress on civil and political rights and others, at the other, who hold that economic and social rights are pre-eminent. We believe that the opposition between these two sets of rights is only apparent. They are in fact the two sides of the same coin. Any model of society which does not simultaneously embrace and advance both sets of rights will sooner or later hit the limits of its expansion.

My Prime Minister, in addressing this Assembly in the general debate of the current session, announced that Mauritius would soon introduce a bill on the protection of human rights in the National Assembly. This bill was debated in our National Assembly during its current sitting and adopted three days ago on Tuesday.

Under the provisions of this bill, a national human rights commission will be established. This commission will be empowered to investigate any complaint of alleged violation of human rights. It will also be able to look into complaints against members of the police force if, following internal investigation, they are not resolved in a satisfactory manner. The commission will therefore act as a watchdog over possible cover-ups or leniency towards abuse by the police.

In setting up this commission, my Government hopes to reinforce the effective protection of the fundamental rights of its citizens already afforded to them under the Constitution. Current judicial recourse against breaches or alleged violations of human rights can be time-consuming and costly. This new body will enable citizens to seek redress more easily.

Other recent measures taken by my country for the protection of the more vulnerable members of society include the establishment of a Child Development Unit with the task of protecting children from abuse and counselling parents of ill-treated children. Last year, a Domestic Violence Intervention Unit was set up to provide psychological counselling and assistance to victims in court.

The theme for this fiftieth anniversary is "All human rights for all". Through the choice of this theme, all Member States of this Organization are being challenged to place human rights at the centre of their policies. Mauritius pledges its full cooperation towards the attainment of this objective.

Next January, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) will hold its first ministerial conference on human rights in Africa. At the invitation of the OAU, Mauritius has agreed to host this timely event.

Mrs. Ahmed (Sudan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Today, we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a very important historical document that has always enjoyed the respect of all countries of the world because it deepens and perpetuates the highest values of our human heritage. The Declaration makes frequent reference to the importance of human rights throughout history. Moreover, all heavenly religions urge respect for human beings and their rights and dignity.

In this context, national efforts for the promotion of human rights are exerted. That is why the Sudanese Constitution and relevant legislations, provide for respect of all the human rights of every citizen, without discrimination. My country participates with the international community in celebrating this occasion and reaffirms its commitment to all international human rights covenants. In so doing, my country is acting consistent with its cultural heritage and the tolerant values by which it is guided. It derives these from Islam, which 1,400 years ago established an integrated system for the protection of civil and political rights and consolidated the principle of honouring and preserving the freedom of peoples. Islam also addresses all human beings without discrimination. In the Holy Koran, God says:

> "We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation." (*The Holy Koran, XVII:70*)

As we observe this important occasion, it would seem appropriate that we recall the need for tolerance and objectivity in addressing questions of human rights and that we steer away from politicization, selectivity and double standards, in order to attain the noble objectives for which the relevant legislation was enacted. In this context we should take into consideration the social, cultural, ideological and religious particularities of every society. Thus, we should focus on the right to development as an integral part of human rights, especially in the developing countries, where poverty and the lack of basic services hinder the enjoyment of human rights.

This historic occasion coincides with the passage of 50 years since the beginning of the fraternal Palestinian people's crisis. The international community should continue to support the Palestinian people in their struggle to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their own State on their national territory.

We wish once again to welcome this special occasion and the efforts of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, in supporting and promoting respect for

human rights at all levels. Let us all pray for a world in which the values of liberty, equality and justice may prevail, without discrimination as to religion, gender or language.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Ethiopia.

Mr. Mohammed (Ethiopia): Fifty years ago, on 10 December 1948, this Assembly took a historic step by adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by proclaiming it as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations in the promotion and respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The manifold forms of misery which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sought to eradicate 50 years ago remain prevalent throughout the world. Over 1 billion people today still live in absolute poverty, deprived of their daily basic needs. This situation makes it necessary for concrete steps to be taken to ensure the universal enjoyment and realization of all human rights, in particular the right of all to development.

As a founding Member of the United Nations that had the privilege of participating in the formulation and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and based on its own recent experience, Ethiopia fully recognizes the significance and historic importance of this document. In this respect, I wish to point out that, in today's Ethiopia, the promotion and respect of human rights have become the foundation upon which the political and democratic transformation, as well as the economic development of the country, firmly rest. To this end, following the collapse of the military regime in 1991, the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were incorporated into the transitional Charter of Ethiopia, thereby becoming part of the law of the country, and subsequently reaffirmed in the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, while incorporating the basic principles and ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, also stipulates that all human rights provisions of the Constitution shall be interpreted in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments accepted by Ethiopia. At present, Ethiopia is a party to all major international human rights instruments. Furthermore, additional practical measures, ranging from the general review of the legal system to the establishment of a national human rights commission and an ombudsman office, have been undertaken in order to strengthen the promotion of basic human rights and freedom in Ethiopia.

It is indeed quite unfortunate and sad to note that the Government of Eritrea has once again demonstrated its utter contempt for the international community by taking advantage of this august occasion and having the audacity to make the usual litany of false accusations of human rights violations against Ethiopia. It is therefore with great reluctance that my delegation would like to set the record straight, although such irrelevant rhetoric ought not have the dignity of attention.

The facts are very clear. The Eritrean regime committed an act of aggression against Ethiopia, a gross violation of human rights in itself, on 12 May 1998. During this wanton action, Eritrean forces deliberately chose to attack civilian targets, such as schools and health centres, killing scores of innocent people, including children and women. In addition, more than 30,000 Ethiopians were brutally expelled from Eritrea after their properties were confiscated and subjected to the worst forms of abuse. The Government of Eritrea attempted to create havoc inside Ethiopia by organizing some of its citizens in the country into clandestine terrorist groups, prompting the Government to take some precautionary measures in order to safeguard the national security of the country and its citizens.

The irresponsible action of the Eritrean Government is clearly attested to by its rather negative response to the various peace proposals of friendly countries and its defiance of the Organization of African Unity and Security Council resolutions to reverse its act of aggression.

Therefore, although it has not been our intention to raise this issue here, I would like to inform the Assembly that the accusations made by the Eritrean representative are no more than a continuation of prevarication and diversionary tactics by the Eritrean Government, in order to present itself to the international community as a victim, while the facts on the ground are quite the reverse.

In conclusion, while reaffirming Ethiopia's unwavering commitment to the full realization of the principles and ideals enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, my delegation would also like to underscore the importance of international

cooperation and support of efforts aimed at promotion of and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Swaziland.

Mr. Dlamini (Swaziland): The Kingdom of Swaziland is pleased to join previous speakers who have spoken on this agenda item and supports the resolution on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As we all recall, since its establishment the United Nations has been determined to help realize in all countries fundamental human rights and ensure the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal enjoyment of rights of men and women. It has done this through its determination to maintain international peace and security, thus enhancing international law, the promotion of social progress and better living standards.

Whilst much has been achieved in the promotion and maintenance of human rights and fundamental freedoms since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the world community is still faced with a multitude of challenges today as we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration.

It is worth noting that progress in this area has been stifled in the developing nations of the world, particularly in Africa, by historical political considerations. There is need for genuine collaboration in recovering from the effects of the colonial and cold-war eras. Furthermore, the problem of poverty prevalent in all countries of the world is far more acute in Africa. Unfortunately, poverty can only provoke violent reactions. It is a fact that economic frustrations have led to crises most often leading to armed conflict. The eradication of poverty should remain central to our endeavours to address the prevention of causes of conflict. It is extremely disturbing, though, that the efforts by the United Nations and the international community to eradicate poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and malnutrition have not been met with strong political will to mobilize and use the much-needed resources, which would only ensure that the rights of the voiceless are attained.

We believe that national effort must be supported in a spirit of true partnership. Cooperation at the international level is important in ensuring the promotion of all human rights, bearing in mind that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The Kingdom of Swaziland would like to emphasize that partnership in this regard should be aimed at ensuring universal respect for the full enjoyment by all people of their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, including the right to self-determination.

May I sound a word of caution that selectivity and conditionalities only result in negativity. Political rights must be considered on a level equal to the right to development. After all, the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development over ten years ago was a very important development which marked a turning point in the efforts of the United Nations in resolving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian nature and in enhancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for every human person and for all peoples in all countries of the world, particularly in developing countries. Furthermore, we believe that recognition, promotion and realization of the right to development is a major step forward towards the achievement of that goal in improving a comprehensive and integrated approach to human rights.

The adoption of the Rome Statute, creating the International Criminal Court in July 1998, could not have come at a more opportune time. This century has seen the worst violence in the history of mankind. In the past 50 years, millions of people have been stripped of their basic human rights, their property and their dignity in conflicts all over the world. Most of these victims have been simply forgotten and few perpetrators have been brought to justice. With the establishment of the International Criminal Court, the growing global culture of impunity will come to an end and the concerns of the victims of those offences covered by the Statute will be addressed accordingly.

The Kingdom of Swaziland is fully committed and desires to promote and protect the full enjoyment of human rights by all Swazis. Continuous efforts are being undertaken to eradicate poverty, improve health conditions, substantially reduce unemployment, ensure the implementation of education regarding all policies, including the policy of equality between women and men, as well as other social and economic policies aimed at improving the living conditions of all citizens. Furthermore, the political rights of the Swazi citizens are promoted and protected and programmes aimed at ensuring them are in place. This includes the Constitutional Review Commission, which has achieved substantial progress in its work.

Another very important achievement in the past year has been the completion of the National Development

Strategy, which provides the framework for the nation's development priorities over the next 25 years, including the question of human rights in all its forms. This includes the Economic and Social Reform Agenda, which is intended to boost the economic efforts of the Kingdom of Swaziland. It is aimed at affording people at all levels, including the grass-roots level, economic empowerment. The Investment Promotion Authority is yet another initiative, and it acts as the Kingdom's contact point with the global business community in attracting investment on a large scale. It thus serves to accelerate the tempo of the economic empowerment of the people at the grass-roots level.

The Swazi nation is involved in all these vitally important exercises. In fact, it is a Swazi way of life to debate issues and consult in open forums, thus giving all people the opportunity to express their views and have them considered.

May I conclude by urging the international community that, as we enter the new millennium, the nations of the world must recommit themselves to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. In doing so we would be living up to the standards and expectations of our peoples, who look up to this Organization as a provider of international peace and security, stability, sustainable development and hope for the future.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Today's observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights highlights the importance accorded by the United Nations and the entire international community to the issue of human rights and the search for a world in which humankind can enjoy freedom, justice and equality, a world that is secure and prosperous for the present generation and for generations to come.

The State of Kuwait attaches special importance to human rights. The basic principles of Kuwaiti society are based on the pillars of justice, freedom, equality, cooperation, the rule of law, stable standards of living and the provision of guarantees for all human rights. Those guarantees are enshrined in the constitution of Kuwait. They are considered its salient characteristics. In promoting and protecting human rights, my country is guided by the words of God, as expressed in the glorious Koran, as well as by the many traditions of the prophet, Muhammed, which hold humankind in esteem as the inheritor of the earth and all its creatures. Humankind has inherited the earth with the instructions of Allah.

My country is marching in that direction, as expressed in the words of His Royal Highness the Emir of my country, who said that hope for illustrious human fraternity springs from merciful hearts believing in the dignity of humankind, whose rights they uphold as a torch that lights the way.

The Kuwaiti people are in the vanguard of those who are sensitive to the issue of human rights. We abide by them, advocate them and act according to their principles. The Kuwaiti people's Assembly, the parliament of Kuwait, has set up a permanent committee on human rights, which ensures respect by all for human rights in implementing the relevant Kuwaiti constitutional provisions.

The Kuwaiti people may have suffered more than others from the consequences of the violations of human rights and the flouting of their principles by some States. Since the Iraqi invasion of 1990, we have been suffering from a lack of real, genuine Iraqi cooperation in returning Kuwaiti prisoners of war, hostages and the nationals of other States or even in disclosing their whereabouts. Indeed, that is the primary humanitarian issue that Kuwait is currently dealing with. For their part, the Kuwaiti Government and people will never rest until Iraq discloses their whereabouts in accordance with universal principles and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We hope that this lofty occasion that we are celebrating today — the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — will motivate the Iraqi Government to cooperate faithfully and earnestly with the International Committee of the Red Cross to end the suffering of those innocent hostages and of their relatives and friends, as well as of the nationals of other countries.

God has honoured and favoured humankind over all His other creatures, as the object and the end of life and development. The rights of humankind, granted by God and safeguarded in divinely inspired legislation and positive laws, must henceforth be preserved.

In conclusion, we hope that the whole world will witness further respect for human rights in the future.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*interpretation from Spanish*): In the wake of the horrors and atrocities committed in two World Wars, and as a reaction to them, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights embodied age-old wisdom dating back to the dawn of humankind, to the distant past in which our civilizations were born, to the Greek philosophers, to the great religions — Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist — and to the English philosophers and the French philosophers who spoke out to limit the all-powerful State in relation to the inalienable rights of the individual and protection of the citizen against the arbitrary will of the sovereign.

The Declaration, which incorporates the human rights provisions of the Charter, remains the most impressive and enlightened achievement of the United Nations. It can be stated with confidence that it enjoys moral and psychological authority without rival, with the possible exception of the Charter.

On 10 December 1948 the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the first international document that defined and proclaimed human rights with universal validity and application, thus setting in motion a continuous process of far-reaching importance for all humankind. It proclaimed for the first time economic and social right, which, because of their importance, were placed on an equal footing with traditional civil and political rights. At that time this was regarded as revolutionary, and would in itself be enough to give the Declaration a prominent place in history. Since then, billions of people — men, women, elderly people and children — have resorted to this document for help and guidance.

Fifty years after its proclamation, the validity of that document is not in decline. It is a source of inspiration for many resolutions, treaties and international conventions, as well as a set of mechanisms for the protection and observance of specific human rights. The principal guidelines of these instruments are contained in the Declaration adopted in 1948.

Many countries have regarded the Declaration's provisions as legally binding and have thus incorporated them into their political constitutions and fundamental laws. The Proclamation of Tehran established the faith of the international community in the principles of the Declaration and urged all peoples to abide by those principles and to redouble their efforts to provide every citizen with a free and decent life allowing for, a state of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action underscores that the Declaration is a goal for all peoples and nations. The Declaration is a source of inspiration and has provided the basis for the United Nations to establish the norms contained in international human rights instruments.

We are meeting today to commemorate this historic event, to look back with humility over 50 years and evaluate what has happened since then. It is an opportunity to engage in reflection, self-examination and self-criticism, to look not only at the positive aspects, but also at the difficulties and obstacles that had to be overcome, to use our experience in order to overcome the problems of the present and the future.

Colonialism and apartheid are but two of the problems that have been relegated to history in most of the countries on this planet. New challenges, however, call for creative and flexible approaches under the doctrine of human rights and the guiding light of the Universal Declaration. Some of the major challenges to the enjoyment of human rights are drug-trafficking, terrorism, racial discrimination, ethnic cleansing, armed conflicts among minorities, discrimination against women, exploitation of children, xenophobia, lack of development and extreme poverty.

At the threshold of the new millennium, more than a billion human beings live in total destitution, and the desperation and frustration of their daily struggle often culminates in conflicts that shatter the bonds of social cohesion, leading to outbreaks of violence. Improving the human condition must be the goal of our endeavours and undertakings.

In Nicaragua we have had many problems as a result of lack of respect for human rights in the past. As a result, since 1948, we have suffered devastating civil wars. However, today we have overcome that situation. The President of Nicaragua, Mr. Arnoldo Alemán, in his address to the Assembly at this session, stated,

> "In commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we reaffirm our commitment to continue to work with all the means at our disposal to promote and protect human rights. In Nicaragua we are moving ahead with the consolidation of peace and democracy based on full respect for human rights, establishment of the rule of law, respect for the separation of powers and the guarantee of individual

liberties. At the same time, we have taken important steps in order to reach higher levels of economic development with social equity." *(A/53/PV.12, p. 10)*

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Dubor (Sierra Leone): We are gathered here today to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. My delegation is pleased to be part of this momentous occasion.

Indeed, a lot has been achieved since the birth of the Declaration in 1948. We have seen, *inter alia*, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and, most importantly, the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. It is common knowledge that this document has achieved universal recognition beyond what its architects contemplated. Human rights have been enshrined in the constitutions of almost every country of the world.

However, although much has been achieved, much still remains to be done because gross violations of human rights are still taking place in the world today.

My Government is committed to the protection and enhancement of human rights for all its citizens. Our Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of speech, movement, assembly, life, press and the maintenance of the rule of law. The due process of law is also strictly observed. This has been adequately demonstrated in the conduct of the current treason trials, which have been acclaimed by international observers to be transparent and fair.

Since 1991, a gruelling war has been going on in my country, and we have seen the most horrible violations of the rights of innocent civilians by the rebels. The country has witnessed the amputation of the arms and limbs of innocent civilians and the rape of women for no other reason than their support for democracy. It is the fundamental right of the citizens of every country to elect and support a Government of their choice. The international community must not allow this right to be thwarted by the violence of a group of rebels who do not believe in democracy.

Against this background, we would like to appeal to the international community to step up its assistance to the Government and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group to bring to an end the continued gross violation of human rights committed by the remaining rebels of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and the Revolutionary United Front.

Although much has been achieved in the area of civil and political rights, we believe that much still remains to be done to enhance economic and social rights in the world. The gap between the rich and the poor needs to be closed. The onerous conditionalities imposed on poor countries by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank should be re-examined because very often they have led to internal conflicts. The right to education, health and a decent standard of living are no less important than the right to freedom of expression.

The adoption of the Statute of the permanent International Criminal Court in July this year in Rome is one of the greatest achievements in the development of international humanitarian law. No longer will the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and genocide go scot-free. They will be brought to justice before this Court.

My Government has signed the Rome Statute because we believe it will contribute immensely to deterring the violation of human rights. I call upon all countries which have not signed the Rome Statute to do so as quickly as possible and to proceed with its ratification.

In conclusion, I wish to restate that my Government will continue to strive to uphold the ideals enshrined in the Declaration whose fiftieth anniversary we are assembled here to commemorate.

The Acting President: I now call on the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al-Humaimidi (Iraq) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The peoples of the world are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What makes this event all the more significant is that it coincides with the five-year review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action with a view to enhancing and protecting human rights in a way that makes us feel that mankind, on the threshold of the third millennium, has come very close to realizing its aspirations to live in an

environment in which the dignity and the future of individuals are secure and the advancement of the social progress of all peoples is achieved without discrimination, in accordance with the principles and provisions of human rights instruments and the Charter of the United Nations. But a brief glance around us shows that the aspirations we dreamed of as we voiced the principles and lofty ideals of human rights were mere illusions; this cannot but increase the frustration that has been growing daily. We live in a world divided into a rich North and a poor South. More than 80 per cent of the world's natural resources are controlled and consumed by only 20 per cent of humanity. Due to this division, which is the result of exploitation and selfishness, millions of people die of starvation and malnutrition, and the gap is still widening.

It is in this environment, in which the minority cannot increase their wealth without all others becoming poorer, that we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In fact, no divine religion, wisdom or set of human values can accept a tragic environment of this kind that deprives some four fifths of humanity of a life in human conditions. When the one fifth of humanity which so selfishly controls the resources speaks about human rights, the other four fifths are horrified at their hypocrisy. The strongest and the richest have the freedom to devour the poorest and the weakest. In the relationship between the strong and the weak, freedom is one thing that is suppressed. In such an economic, political and cultural environment, which is based on the hegemony of the strong over the weak, the overwhelming majority is suffering now as a result of the premeditated judgement and limited vision formulated by the strong and imposed on the others. That vision is centred around the wealthy minority as the sole actor in today's material civilization; it views other civilizations as static civilizations that have exhausted their capacity for progress and renaissance. All of this is contrary to the facts of life and history.

While the international community has made strenuous and sincere efforts to establish rules and principles aimed at the achievement of human well-being and the establishment of safe societies enjoying welfare and stability and respecting human rights, we find that those rights are violated by selective and subjective practices aimed at imposing a single approach to the interpretation and implementation of these rights that would further selfish political objectives. Human rights have become a political weapon in the hands of some States, and a selective measure used in accordance with a double standard that favours the interests and purposes of those States. They have also become a means of blackmail and political pressure on certain other States.

All of this constitutes a violation of one of the most important principles on which the Charter of the United Nations is based: the principle of the equal rights and duties of States and nations. What arouses the concern of the developing countries in particular is the deliberate neglect of and indifference to fundamental rights that have been established by United Nations declarations as principles, such as the right to self-determination, respect for the sovereignty, independence and national and territorial integrity of States and the right to development.

Iraq has suffered acutely from this abnormal situation, which is illustrated by the imposition of the comprehensive embargo on Iraq in 1990. This is unprecedented in history. During the past eight years, this unjust embargo has stood as a flagrant violation of the collective and individual human rights of Iraqis. Since the imposition of the sanctions, more than a million innocent children have perished, in addition to another million children who have been infected with infectious diseases and diseases related to chronic malnutrition. Half a million citizens have died as a result of the prevalence of various diseases and the increase of cancer and of nervous disorders. The environmental sector has also experienced heavy destruction as a result of the unjust military aggression in 1991 when United States and British forces, without any moral deterrence, used internationally banned weapons such as depleted uranium shells — in quantities, according to many international reports and the confessions of United States and British officials, of hundreds of tons.

Adopting a punitive policy towards Iraq by insisting upon the prolongation of the embargo in spite of Iraq's fulfilment of all the commitments under the relevant Security Council resolutions constitutes a crime of genocide which is punishable under international law in times of either war or peace.

The cornerstone of human rights is the ability of everyone, particularly the strong, to sincerely recognize that human beings are human beings, and that they are all of the highest worth and are entitled to live in justice and peace within their local and national societies and within the framework of the community of States and peoples, without any threat to life or plunder of their culture or civilization.

The Acting President: I call next on the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) (*interpretation from French*): It is difficult to say something that has not already been said in the course of this commemoration, but I shall say a few words about my own country, Afghanistan, and human rights. Afghanistan is an Islamic country. As Muslims, we believe in the divine word; as we read in the Koran, "We have honoured the children of Adam" (*XVII:70*).

It is in this spirit that the Afghan delegation participated in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights half a century ago, in 1948, in the General Assembly. Afghanistan has ratified most of the international instruments in the field of human rights. This half-century has been the source of many lessons for all of humankind and especially for the Afghan nation. Afghanistan has been suffering from a series of armed conflicts for the last 20 years. It is becoming increasingly clear in our world that war, foreign intervention and, above all, armed intervention are the most atrocious forms of human rights violations, beginning with the most fundamental human right, the right to life.

In a resolution adopted unanimously in the General Assembly yesterday morning, prior to beginning these statements in commemoration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we reaffirmed that we should ensure the effective exercise of the rights of women and of the girl child, which are an inalienable and indivisible part of all human rights and basic freedoms. In Afghanistan, the rights of women have been particularly violated for four years now, and women have been the victims of the most fundamental violations.

As the representative of a war-stricken country where men, women and children aspire to live in peace, I propose that, along with civil, political, economic and cultural rights, the international community should formulate provisions on the right of peoples and nations to peace as a human right.

Our experience in Afghanistan proves that warfare provides the principal setting for violations of human rights, especially warfare caused by foreign intervention. This illustrates the importance of the role of the United Nations in preventing war in the first place and in bringing it to an end if it should arise.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Varšo (Slovakia) (*interpretation from French*): I am very honoured to address the General Assembly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Slovak Republic associated itself yesterday with the statement made by Austria on behalf of the European Union, and I would now like to make some brief remarks on behalf of my delegation.

The commemoration of an anniversary is always an opportunity to reflect on the fundamental issues involved. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948 is no exception. We should reflect today on the origin of the idea of "codifying" humanity's fundamental rights and freedoms, to what extent that idea has been fulfilled to date and what its future will be.

It is a paradox of history that the elaboration of this magnanimous code of fundamental rights and freedoms for the members of the human family had to be based on humanity's tragic experiences, particularly those having to do with the atrocious crimes committed by human beings against other human beings during the Second World War. The Declaration necessarily reflects and implicitly embodies these ideas along with the aims its sets for itself. We must recall this from time to time so that future generations will know the *raison d'être* and the historical context of the emergence of this small bible of principles for the conduct of human beings among themselves.

Unfortunately, the current situation in this regard is not at all satisfactory. We are witnessing violations of human rights in most of the world and, what is more, often on a massive scale. Civil wars and general hatred among peoples, which occurs for various reasons that are often very difficult to understand, frequently have a direct impact first and foremost on innocent people. But it would be an exaggeration to say that the Declaration's pursuit of its objective is in fact being undermined, because this obviously does not hold true for many regions of our world. We must now ask ourselves what needs to be done to ensure that these fundamental rights and freedoms are not trampled.

Given that since the adoption of the Declaration in 1948 the legal basis for human rights has been expanded and consolidated and that States recognize these rights,

we must find mechanisms to ensure that the legal instruments are genuinely applied throughout our world. The most important thing is for us to unreservedly endorse the idea that it is in our common interest to rigorously pursue and secure respect for human rights within the triangular framework that encompasses all actors concerned, namely, the individual, to whom those rights belong; the State, as guarantor in their appropriate and unequivocal application; and the international community, which takes responsibility when the domestic means of the State are not capable of ensuring their application.

We note with interest the growing role at the international level of the monitoring bodies created pursuant to international treaties in the area of human rights, particularly judicial bodies. In this regard, I wish to inform the Assembly that the Slovak Republic will shortly be signing the Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted at the Rome Conference in July 1997, as that signature has recently been approved by the Slovak Government.

In the Slovak Republic the question of genuine respect for human rights is a constant concern of our authorities. After the last elections in September, the new Government established the post of Deputy Prime Minister for human rights, and Parliament similarly created a committee specifically entrusted with human rights questions. The Slovak Government proclaimed in its programme statement,

> "Constant attention will be given to the human dimension in foreign policy. The Government will play an active role in strengthening the system of international standards in the field of human rights, including those relating to the rights of national minorities".

In conclusion, allow me to also inform the Assembly that on the occasion of this anniversary, the Slovak Government issued a statement that notes, among other things, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the fundamental international document that has had the greatest impact in the second half of the twentieth century on positive developments in the area of human rights and that those principles have been incorporated into the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. The Government of the Slovak Republic is resolved to create an effective system for the protection of human rights in a framework of the rule of law.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 76th plenary meeting on 2 December 1998, I now call on the Observer of Switzerland.

Mr. Staehelin (Switzerland) (*interpretation from French*): Many speakers before me have emphasized the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is the "mother" of all human rights conventions and whose anniversary we are commemorating. However, they have also underlined how far we still have to go before this Declaration is fully respected. My statement will touch on several aspects of human rights to which Switzerland attaches special importance.

The recent adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms is for us a source of pride. It guarantees a more effective implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this connection, we hope that the Commission on Human Rights will set up the necessary international monitoring machinery for its implementation throughout the world.

In the same context, we hope that the implementation of the Convention against torture might be enhanced by the adoption of an optional protocol, as proposed by Costa Rica and Switzerland. Let us not forget either that protection of the individual is particularly vulnerable in the situations of violence or internal conflict that characterize our era. It is urgent, therefore, to identify basic standards for humanity that reflect international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and that would apply in all circumstances and to all protagonists, be they State, international or non-State actors.

Crucial importance should also be attached to the realization of the rights of women and children. Millions of women are sexually mutilated or do not have equal access to education, and millions of children are deprived of schooling and forcibly recruited into armed conflicts. These and other examples show how the right to development and the rights of individuals are interconnected.

My country's commitment to human rights is given concrete form by a variety of activities. Its symbol is the Palais Wilson in Geneva, the new home of the Office of

the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which Switzerland officially handed over to the United Nations last June.

In order to meet the growing need for well-trained personnel who are prepared to work in the field for international organizations, Switzerland has created for this purpose a body of experts, to be trained in Geneva in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The opening of borders and of markets has given economic protagonists a power whose scope is not always easy to grasp. It is important, therefore, to make these economic actors more aware of the rights of the individual and more responsible in this respect. Switzerland has begun a dialogue in this regard, which, we believe, must also take place multilaterally and within the framework of the international organizations concerned.

We consider that an internationally credible policy on the rights of the individual must allow for constructive criticism and its acceptance. This would strengthen dialogue, which helps us progress. That does not mean, however, that we can distance ourselves from the conclusions of the Vienna Conference. Human rights are universal and indivisible. Dialogue cannot lead to relative judgments on the most fundamental rights. There are different forms of cultural adaptation of universal rights, and their integration can take time. But the common basis for dialogue is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, as its name implies, is unique and universal.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 76th plenary meeting on 2 December 1998, I now call on the Observer of the Holy See.

Mr. Martino (Holy See): In recognition of the importance that the Holy See attaches to this commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I have the honour to convey to the General Assembly the personal message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, which I will personally present to Mr. Opertti.

(spoke in French)

"I take particular pleasure, through this message, in associating myself with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations, the depositary of the one of the most precious and significant documents in the history of law.

"I do so all the more willingly because in a solemn Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church did not hesitate to affirm that while sharing in the joys and hopes and sorrows and fears of the people of this age, it also asks that we overcome and eradicate, as contrary to God's intent, every type of discrimination with respect to the fundamental rights of the individual.

"By proclaiming a given number of fundamental rights to which all members of the human family are entitled, the Declaration has contributed decisively to the development of international law, challenged national legislations and permitted millions of men and women to live in greater dignity.

"However, to observe the world today is to realize that these fundamental rights — proclaimed, codified and celebrated though they are — are still the object of continuous and serious violations. This anniversary is therefore, for all of the States that abide by the 1948 text, an appeal for an examination of conscience.

"Too often the tendency is for some to choose this or that right according to their own liking and to ignore the ones that go against their transient interests. Others do not hesitate to isolate particular rights and take them out of context in order to justify their actions, often confusing liberty with licence, or to secure advantages for themselves without regard for human solidarity. Such attitudes clearly imperil the organic structure of the Declaration, which harmonizes each right with other rights and with the other obligations and limits that are required by an equitable society.

"Moreover, such attitudes sometimes lead to an exaggerated individualism that may compel the strongest to dominate the weak and thus undermine the bond solidly established by the text between liberty and social justice. Let us therefore avoid seeing this fundamental text with the passage of years become merely a monument to be admired, or, worse even, a document consigned to the archives.

"For this reason I wish to repeat here what I stated on the occasion of my first visit to the Headquarters of this Organization on 2 October 1979:

> 'If the truths and principles contained in this document were to be forgotten or ignored and were thus to lose the genuine self-evidence that so distinguished them at the time they were brought painfully to birth, then the noble purpose of the United Nations [the peaceful coexistence of peoples and nations] would be faced with the threat of new destruction.' *(A/34/PV.17, para. 21)*

You will thus not be surprised if the Holy See gladly associates itself with the statement of the Secretary-General, who recently said that this anniversary provides the opportunity to ask not only how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can protect our rights, but how we can rightly protect the Declaration.

"The struggle for human rights is, therefore, a challenge to be met, and it requires perseverance and creativity from all of us. If, for example, the text of 1948 managed to limit the rigid concept of State sovereignty by which Governments were not held accountable for how they treated their citizens, no one can deny that new forms of sovereignty have since appeared. Today there are numerous international actors, individuals and organizations, who in reality enjoy a sovereignty comparable to that of a State and who decisively influence the destiny of millions of men and women. Thus it is important to find the appropriate ways to make sure that these actors also apply the principles of the Declaration.

"Moreover, 50 years ago the post-war political context did not allow the authors of the Declaration to endow it with an anthropological basis and explicit moral references, but they were very well aware that the principles proclaimed in the Declaration would be very soon devalued if the international community did not seek to anchor them in the various national cultural and religious traditions. It may be the task now ahead of us to faithfully maintain the unity of the authors' vision and to promote a legitimate pluralism in the exercise of the liberties proclaimed by the Declaration, while at the same time ensuring the universality and the indivisibility of the rights embodied in it.

"The challenge to be met is to promote the 'common standard' to which the Preamble of the Declaration refers and to allow it to become increasingly the ultimate reference in which human liberty and solidarity among persons and cultures meet and mutually enrich one another. This is why questioning the universality or even the existence of some of the fundamental principles would result in undermining the whole structure of human rights.

"At the end of this year, 1998, we see around us too many of our brothers and sisters overwhelmed by natural calamities, decimated by sickness, prostrated by ignorance and poverty, or victimized by cruel and endless wars. Alongside them, others more affluent seem to be sheltered from instability and to enjoy, at times ostentatiously, the necessities of life as well as many excesses. What has become of the right stated in article 28:

> 'Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.'

Dignity, freedom and happiness will never be complete without solidarity. This is very much the lesson of the tormented history of these last 50 years.

"Therefore let us embrace this precious heritage and, above all, make it bear fruit for the happiness of all and for the honour of each of us!

"I fervently pray for the development of fraternity and harmony between the peoples that the United Nations represents, and I invoke the abundance of God's blessings for all."

This is signed by Pope John Paul II.

The Acting President: The Chair has been informed that Mr. Juan Adolfo Singer, President of the Latin American Parliament, has encountered some travel difficulties and will not be making a statement. Copies of Mr. Singer's written text, however, will be available at the back of the conference room.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/265 of 24 August 1994, I now call on the observer of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Mr. Linati-Bosch (Sovereign Military Order of Malta) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour of addressing the General Assembly on behalf of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, a subject of international law that has celebrated nine centuries of existence and thus may be considered the oldest entity of a humanitarian nature that has survived to the present day.

The presence of the Order of Malta in more than 100 countries, the efforts of its volunteer corps and its work — which was highlighted during the recent emergencies in the Caribbean — give proof of its service to mankind. The diplomatic relations that it maintains with 82 Member States of the United Nations guarantee its independent functioning, which is confirmed by its presence at the United Nations and at the most important and relevant international organizations. The agreement recently reached with the Republic of Malta concerning the use of Fort Sant'Anglu in Birgu provides a recent example of its presence in the field of public law. From its extraterritorial seat in Rome, the Order exercises its sovereign functions.

All this justifies the importance that the Order gives to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to its effective application. Without doubt the Declaration represents the highest point ever achieved in the pursuit of a more equitable world. All the specific items needed for guaranteeing and recognizing human rights are included in the Declaration of 10 December 1948. Let us remember that the opposition to discrimination for reasons of race, sex or religion, the freedom and security of individuals, the right to life, the abolition of slavery, equality before the law, freedom of residence, and the rights of families and to property that are included in the Declaration text are milestones in humanity's long journey to the present day.

At the same time, however, we must be mindful of the fact that these objectives have not yet been fully achieved. More than 800 million people live in conditions of abject poverty or suffer hunger. Drugs, terrorism, prostitution, racism, armed conflicts and ignorance are among the other scourges that beset an incredible number of human beings.

If we accept that each right is linked to a duty, I can say that the Sovereign Order of Malta understands its duties. In accordance with our tradition, we must declare that human rights come directly from God. Over the centuries human consciences have only slowly become aware of this idea. The last 50 years have marked an important advance, a great part of the credit for which is due to the United Nations and its agencies.

No one can shrink from his contribution to the cause of humanity. From the right to be born to the right to a dignified death, human life follows a path that must be protected. Today this is still not the case.

When human rights are under attack, their protection is the responsibility of every State, within the limits of its own sovereignty. But the international community must also be mindful of its own responsibility. For this reason, the Sovereign Order of Malta has to do its utmost to support the work of the United Nations when the Organization takes upon itself the heavy burden of converting the letter of the Declaration into reality.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker for the commemorative occasion.

I now declare concluded the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 46?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: We have thus concluded consideration of agenda item 46 as a whole.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.